

MAMMOTH CAVE ROMANCE

WILLIAM LEE POPHAM

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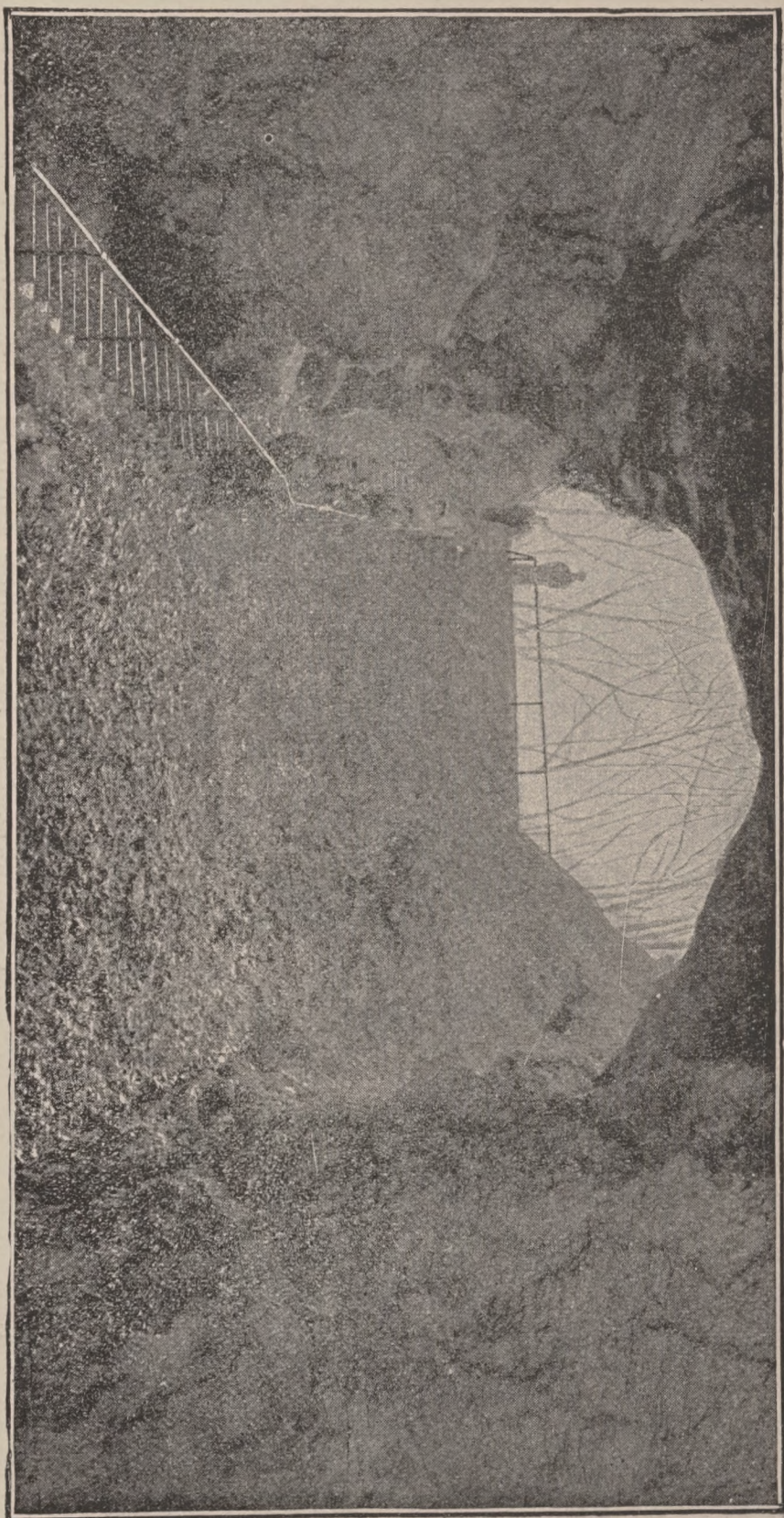


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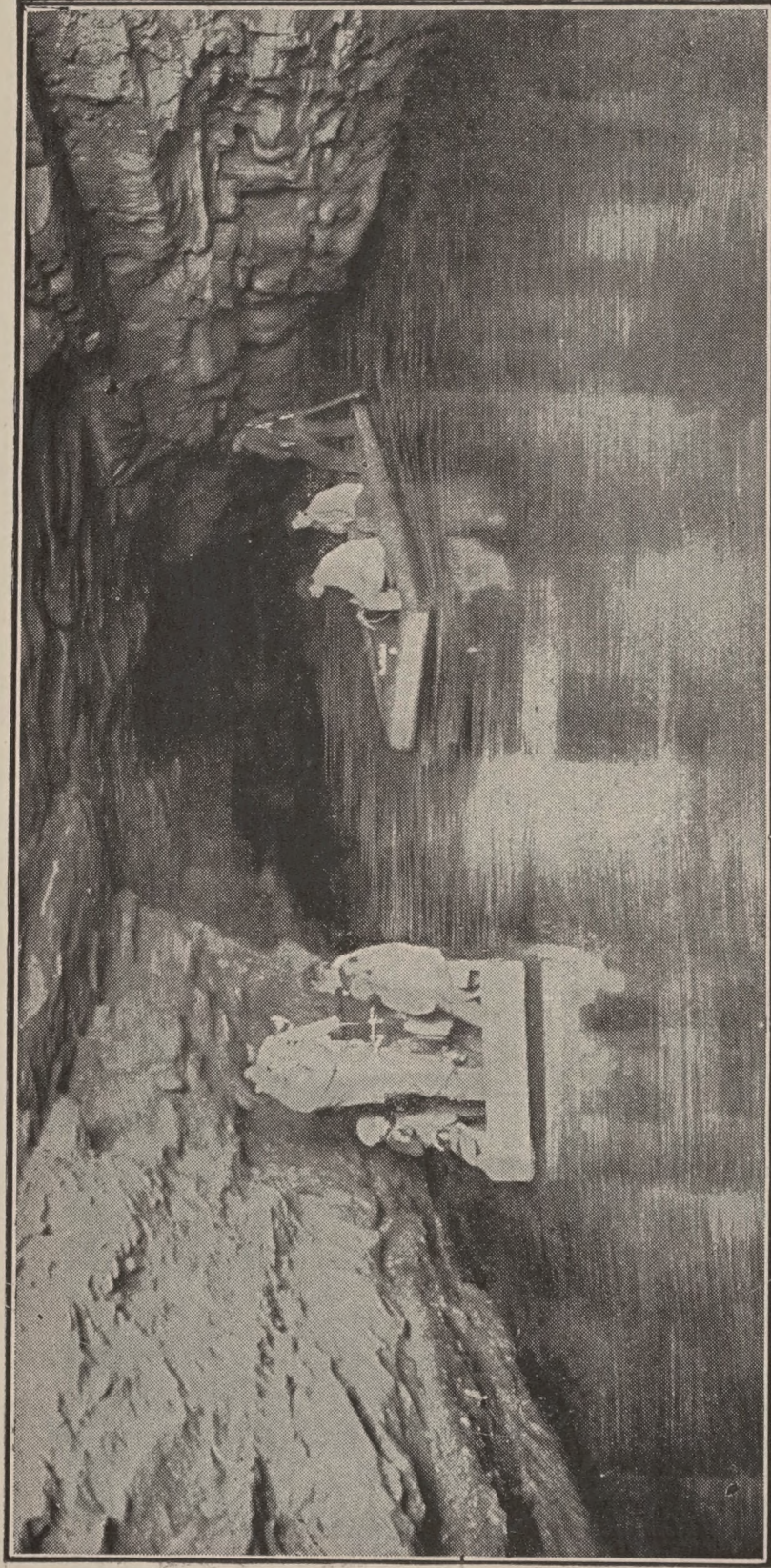
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CAVE ENTRANCE LOOKING OUT IN SUMMER

ECHO RIVER, 360 FEET UNDERGROUND



Echo River is traversed by boat for a distance of quite half a mile, and a ride over its clear water is one of the unique experiences of the world. Nowhere else can it be duplicated.

Nearly all the river is one vast resonator; its branching avenues and side crevices, its lofty roof of limestone rock, its ancient battlemented shores all serve as reflectors of every sound, no matter how slight, and send it back intensified a thousand times, with its roughness blended into one sweet volume of glorious harmony. Nowhere else on earth or in it, can such rich tone be heard, coming back to one with ever diminishing volume as it rolls down along the unknown halls and reverberates from secret chamber walls.

In every part of the Cave, the air is abundant, and as sweet and pure as ever breathed by adventurous man.

MAMMOTH CAVE

Is a great subterranean world, with starry firmament, dells and grottoes, pits and domes, mountains and rivers, cascades, etc. Temperature at all times, 54 degrees. The Cave has five different levels and 226 streets and avenues. Of this greatest of all caverns, more than 150 miles have been explored. Eternal darkness and stillness reign here supreme.

A trip to Mammoth Cave means more than merely viewing one of the world's greatest natural wonders. It means observational education—affording scientific studies, indescribable scenes and thrills; pleasant visitation of lasting memory; a helpful vacation of rest and recreation; and something to talk about the remainder of one's lifetime. The Cave is open all the year—accessible to visitors—few or many. Greatest depth—360 feet underground.

A pathway from the Cave Hotel winds thru the garden, down amid the forest, crossing a wagon road that leads to Green River, and then brings us to the only known entrance to Mammoth Cave. The Cave mouth is seven hundred and thirty-five feet above sea level, one hundred and ninety-four feet above the level of Green River, and one hundred and eighteen feet below the crest of the overhanging bluff. The limestone stratum is three hundred and twenty-eight feet thick, measuring from the sand-

stone above to the drainage level below; and within these limits all the vast labyrinth extends its ramifications. One of the first things noticed by the visitor is the strong current of cool air that flows from the Cave mouth, frequently too strong to allow the carrying of lighted lamps until a point is reached many yards within, where the gale dies away. As we descend the solid stone stairway we observe with pleasure a waterfall that leaps from the ledge, gleams in the sunlight, and vanishes amid the rocks on the floor. Around us hang festoons of vines and ferns, and before us is the noble vestibule to a temple of eternal night. An iron gate is unlocked for us, put there to prevent unpaid intrusion and vandal spoliation. Passing thru, we bid farewell to daylight, and depended on the simple lamp given each of us by the guide.—Hovey.

LOCATION

Mammoth Cave is half a mile from Green River, near the main line of the Louisville & Nashville Railroad, in Edmonson County, Kentucky. It is about 90 miles from Louisville, 200 miles from Cincinnati, 188 miles from Evansville, and 96 miles from Nashville.

Mammoth Cave Romance

WILLIAM LEE POPHAM

DESCRIPTION BEING FROM THE AUTHOR'S
OBSERVATION

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No. 1.

CHARACTERS:

FRANKLIN LENTON

MISS VIOLET THURMAN

BARTO JAMISON

BOOKS BY THE SAME AUTHOR

Poems of Truth, Love and Power.
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Mammoth Cave Romance

Mammoth Cave Romance

It was a June morning when Franklin Lenton, with a number of tourists—strangers to each other, posed at the entrance to Mammoth Cave before the camera. With but rare exception, the photographer persuades each company of visitors to assemble in a group, before their descent into the yawning cavern, and later a copy of the group may be purchased, at the option of each visitor.

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Two years previously "Franklin," as the story will name him, took Cave "Route No. 1," and, ere finishing that visit, was summoned to his office in Louisville where he conducted a business in real estate.

"Everybody smile and look pleasant," shouted the photographer, but Franklin did not smile, and if he "looked pleasant," he was far from feeling so.

At this same spot, two years before, Franklin had sat with a group of visitors before the same camera—beside Violet Thurman, a belle of Bowling Green, who was then

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“sweet sixteen,” and one of famed Kentucky’s fairest. This was the very spot where they first met. “I’d give heaven, were it mine,” thought Franklin, “if Violet were only here now as then.”

But Franklin had little time to think ere the company started, in a row by twos, down the stone steps into the open mouth of Mother earth—penetrating the silence of eternal night—amid the cool air of a strange world of thrill and wonder. Thru the iron gate they marched, swinging their lanterns—looking with awe-struck eyes upon

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the limestone walls, each thinking, as no one can describe, his own peculiar thoughts.

Franklin lagged to the rear—to think—not of the natural wonders about him, but to think, at least for a moment, of Violet; for this visit had awakened old, but dear and tender memories—memories of when he first beheld her girlish face, when he had led her over queer and dangerous looking rocks, when she clung safely to his strong and willing arm, when they together emerged from the underground night into the summer sunlight,

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when they lingered by the road-side where the air was sweet with the breath of flowers—and alas! memories of their parting, when she put a farewell letter into his hand—and left him standing alone.

The letter, tho' written two years before—he repeats in his mind: “Dear Franklin, you must not meet me again. It is best for you that you do not; you will find it easier to forget me. Go to the throne of prayer and ask the power to forget, for I am too young to be wooed and won. And now, dear friend, for all the sympathy and friendship—yes

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—for all the love you have given me I thank you. You have the heart of a gentleman, the soul of a Christian man. I admire you—but lovers we must not be. The God you serve so faithfully, bless and keep you—and me. Good bye.”

With the words of this old letter still lingering in his mind, Franklin proceeded with the company—on and on, where day-light has never dawned, and where no sunbeam has ever strayed to kiss away the night.

Methinks that seeing, he saw not—and the guide’s many descriptions of wonderful things were, to

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this lover, almost in vain; for he saw and thought only of Violet.

After hours and miles of wandering hundreds of feet below the earth's surface, the company of "sight-seers" reached the light of day—and looking back upon the entrance thru which they went and came, they observed the perpetual waterfall that leaps in small streams, into the Cave's open mouth—and like a great mustache, the yawning mouth is garlanded with ferns and the greenest of living verdure. Franklin paused but little to look. He broke loose from

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the company—as if he desired to be alone. Crossing the wagon-road near the Cave entrance, he caught sight of a small, white kid glove lying in the road. He stooped to get the glove which still retained, almost perfectly, the shape of the hand that had worn it. He lifted the little glove as carefully as if he feared it might break or dissolve in his hand. To his great surprise, the inside of the glove, near the buttons, bore in silk letters the name “Violet.” He was suddenly struck with this interrogation: “Can it belong to the Violet I love so well?”

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He laid it flat upon his broad palm, and stood looking at it in a waking dream. He lifted it to his lips. A faint perfume reached him. He smoothed and patted the lifeless fingers till they lay unwrinkled in his hand. Like some guilty culprit he looked back but saw the company were still near the entrance at rest. Then looking high into the clear sky, he murmured something—perhaps it was a prayer.

He began to reason as to the probable situation. He knew that no one would wear a white kid glove in the cave; he almost knew that the

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Violet he loved would not be visiting the cave again—unless it might be with some friends.

But the glove was there; it came from a feminine hand—and that recently; and the name it bore was unmistakably “Violet.” To him, how sweet the name!

A happy thought entered his mind. Perhaps its wearer had gone from the cave hotel along the wagon-road, down to the river. This led to another conclusion—that she was in a carriage; for beside the wagon-road there ran a foot-path for those who walked. He paused a

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moment to decide as to the direction he would take to solve the mystery.

Remembering that dinner was to be served just after their return from the cave route, he hastened to the hotel, glancing anxiously at the groups of visitors while passing, and entered the dining-room. Of the abundance of dainty and wholesome viands placed before him he ate heartily—but whether he really enjoyed them—who shall say?

CHAPTER II.

Franklin could see Violet nowhere. His eyes searched the dining-room, verandas, lawns and groves—but in vain. Added to the exercise of his cave journey, was the exhaustion of his vain search. Physically weary, and mentally disquieted, he went to his room to rest awhile. Lying across the bed by the open window, he was soon asleep and dreaming. Thru the window of his dream the garden was like a romantic landscape—painted in gray and white and gold.

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In his dream he saw the winding walks among massed shrubberies, the drooping willows, the sparkling fountains—and it all was reminiscent of the Temple of Love—for in the vision he saw Violet, who beckoned the dreamer. On the wings of dream, he fluttered to her presence among the sunlit glades and spreading shade.

Beneath a dark archway of trees, she greeted him. The garden was large—and very beautiful. Together they strolled happily for a long while. The Temple of Love—yes—just so it had seemed when he first

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looked out upon it. Gazing into her eyes, he thought her the most beautiful person he had ever seen. So cunning and fair, so trustful and innocent, with the loveliest eyes, and a face as fair and blushing as a wild rose. He stood very near her, and she appeared even more beautiful thus closely seen. She looked at him with eyes that he seemed to know very well indeed. She smiled at him with, as it seemed, all her heart in her eyes. "May I take your hand?" he said. And in the dream it seemed the only natural thing to say. She answered with

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her small white hand extended. It was smooth and soft, warm in the palm and chill at the slender fingertips. He held it gently, but hesitated to tell her why he desired to hold it. Therein is found one reason why dreams are so beautiful—one has neither to define nor to explain things. You may wander in beautiful gardens and it's not trespassing. You may go thru orchards and gather the fruit and it's not stealing. You may hold a hand like this—and it's not forbidden. "But I want to kiss your hand. May I?" This might be natural in a

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dream, but it's unnatural when lovers are awake—for few girls say yes—even when they wish to grant your request. “Why not?” she answered, with charming naivete.

So raising her hand to his lips he kissed it. Their eyes met and the meeting was long—so long and so intimate that at last he moved to draw her to him. She drew back and breathed softly: “No, no—not yet.” Now this is not so dream-like. “But you love me?” he whispered. She didn't say “yes.” No woman likes that word. Again their eyes met and their hands, and in his

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dream the scent of the jasmine amid the garden was heavy and sweet. If only the dream could last forever! But it did not last—perhaps, a moment, for dreams are quick as the lightning flash. It broke up in confusion, as dreams will. He was awakened by the flood of June sunshine and the sound of a song-bird.

“Ye Gods! what a dream!” he exclaimed to himself. He rubbed his eyes and rising, bathed his face in cool water and rushed outdoors for a walk.

CHAPTER III.

Franklin sat alone in the park near the hotel—also near the gate-entrance to the wagon-road. He took the little glove from his pocket and placed it to his cheek. Next he looked at the name so beautifully marked in threads of silk, and exclaimed as if talking to the trees, “What an empty place this world is! Even on a beautiful day in June, when love is like the flowers that blush and bloom unseen—unknown, and when you realize that you’ve been led on by illusions, and that

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everything has gone wrong." To Franklin the heavenly June day had lost its charm. The sunshine glimmering across the lawn, the scent of Nature's breath, the cool shade, the shadow of whose wings enfolded him, failed to soothe him. It irritated him even to hear the glad birds singing in the breeze-kissed trees. Life is out of harmony to the one who loves in vain. Sitting thus disconsolate, his attention was attracted by the noise of rolling wheels. He turned his head toward the wagon-road that led down the hill to the valley and beheld a car-

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riage filled with young people—headed for Green River, a half mile below the cave hotel. The crowd in the carriage chatted and laughed. Amid the sounds of mirth and chatter, he heard a familiar voice which struck his heart like an arrow shot from cruel hands. Magic-like his searching eyes found in the crowd the owner of the familiar voice. It was Violet Thurman who with friends and kinsfolk was again visiting the Cave. He started to wave his hand—but it seemed paralyzed. She turned her face toward where he sat. Her flashing eyes seemed to

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melt his throbbing heart. The laughing party, loaded with flowers gathered from the fields, clattered by, and Franklin, with lifted head and choking throat, still sat—as if unable to move. His love-keen eyes picked her unmistakably from the others. While he still looked, she turned her face, and lifting her eyes, looked straight into his very own! Then with a kindly smile, she dropped some flowers into the road—just below the gate. The carriage was departing slowly down the hill. He saw something fall from her hand—and caught himself trem-

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bling in every limb. Their happy voices yet lingered on the still air.

Later, when the crowd had disappeared and their voices had been swallowed in the silence, he walked down the path to the gate; and there, in the dust of the road, he found a bunch of wild, white roses! With something like a sob he knelt and gathered them up, pressing the cool petals to his lips. Like the pounding of a gigantic hammer to his brain he remembered *she* always favored white roses! Was it by accident they had been dropped—or was it——?

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“They must have fallen unnoticed from her arms.” He exclaimed to himself over and over again as he stood there caressing the flowers. “Surely she could not have meant them—for me.”

And yet, in a deep recess of his heart he reasoned that Violet had dropped them, and knew of it, and that they were her gift. So he very tenderly carried the roses back to his room and put them in a bowl on the table.

“She will be at the hotel for supper,” he decided. He hardly knew what to do. Tears almost came to

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his eyes. He wanted to sit in meditation. Again, he wanted to run and shout. Why, the whole world must have changed in one hour! What miracle could have been greater? Finally he knelt and kissed the bowl of flowers. They still kept fresh, as if to cheer him. He hurriedly donned some fresh laundry in preparation for supper.

Luckily, Franklin found Violet in the dining-room, ate at her table—and her smile of gratitude well paid him for the return of the lost glove.

CHAPTER IV.

It was after supper when Franklin and Violet were together—alone. All the fragrance of the flowers seemed to enfold them as they stood in the wagon-road; the great boughs waved a welcome to them; the nightingale was singing, and the lovely, solemn night—with its sweet, brooding silence, seemed listening.

A moonlight night! And such a moon, sailing so round, bright and clear thru the blue sky—a thousand stars attending her! A moon that

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shamed the garish light of day, for its beams fell like a flood of molten silver over the peaceful earth.

All the prosaic humdrum of every-day life had disappeared. The moonlit fields seemed glorified. The western wind was sweet with the balmy breath of blossoms. The rustling of the green boughs, the scent of the dew-kissed flowers, the grace of the nodding trees were all suggestive of the sweetness and fairness of fairyland.

“Two Junes have passed since we met,” said Franklin, “and every day since, I have longed for a meet-

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ing such as this." Violet made no reply—so he continued: "You were sixteen then—perhaps too young to accept my courtesies, but that obstacle should not hinder us now." She listened well and silently. They had come now to a spreading shade flecked here and there with bits of silver moonlight, while the airy, graceful shadows danced over moss-grown rocks. The moonlit land lay fair and smiling while he talked: "Violet, my message is not a secret—I love you, and I want you to hear the words from my very lips—I love you still!"

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While they sat there on a moss-covered stone, the nightingale poured out the story of her love and sorrow. Violet turned to him to speak. Surely the moon had never shone upon a face so fair, so pure, so tender. Those eyes raised to his were lustrous and—perhaps—full of love.

“I like to hear you talk,” she responded, “speak on.” Whoever it was that said that “woman’s tongue is longest,” was in error when it comes to courtship—if not all the time. A woman “makes love” with her smile and eyes. “I

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think this place was created for lovers," he said—"a place like this is so inviting, inspiring, suggestive." He was smiling—a smile that was tender and pleading, and yet withal, a little roguish, perhaps—when he continued: "That which I have to offer you on this lovely June night, is a gift—of all gifts most divine. It hasn't wings—Violet—and it doesn't soar out of sight in the blue heavens singing an angelic song. On the contrary, it plods—sometimes clumsily, along the humble earth, and sometimes it even crawls, but always in the right direction—

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or as nearly the right direction as the difficulties permit."

"Violet," he added, "do you know what this 'gift' is?" Instantly the girl's face crimsoned—and looking down, she could only murmur, after the manner of girls from time immemorial— "I — don't— know." But she did know, aye, even as an ass knoweth the way to the master's crib. As the flood of witching moonlight fell upon her trim and perfect figure so beautifully and tastefully gowned, and she so coyly answered his tender pleading, he realized that memory

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had not done half justice to her glorious beauty.

Suddenly all control slipped from him, and forgetful of the dictates of prudence and decorum and of all things else than that she sat by his side, he leaned over and drew her almost savagely to his wildly throbbing breast as he murmured words of tenderest devotion. He was not conscious of how he gathered her within his strong arms. He stood just where the soft light beamed upon his face, which revealed as never before, the great strength of his loving and loyal heart. Visions

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of happiness greater than he had ever known came before him.

After he had pressed his hungry lips against her rosy lips, she drew away. Protested—but “after.” “You must not do that,” she cried. But he only laughed—laughed in a way he had never done during the two long, endless, heart-craving years.

At last he calmed himself to say: “Only heaven knows how I love you.” She glanced at him with swift admiration—and glanced away before he saw her. She colored deeply.

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“It is growing late,” she ventured, “and we must go.” Reluctantly he obeyed. The rather long and rugged walk back to the hotel seemed very short. But even thorns in “lover’s lane” are but flowers.

CHAPTER V.

Another June morning—and they were walking—just Franklin and Violet. Their last day together at the Cave—and heaven smiled propitiously. The pretty places where they rambled are too many to tell—but the beauties of Nature beamed

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upon them everywhere. Walking together like two rhymes in the same verse—they moved slowly, after the fashion of lovers. All of what they said, we do not know—what they thought, we know less. The sunbeams lighted up the fresh, coloring of her face and hair to wonderful advantage. With temper so sweet, disposition so child-like and gentle—she thought it a heavenly morning—and it was. And he was very attractive—for a man. She watched him closely; saw his white even teeth when he smiled; saw in his white cuffs the glint of

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gold; noted the polish and cleanliness of his nails; the smoothness of his recently-cut hair—and the manly breadth of his shoulders. But women are close observers—especially if they are interested. They could see a hen's teeth without her cackling. The very look from Violet's observing eyes gripped the heart-strings of the man, and turned his soul to song. There was a softness, a beauty, a restfulness about her look which were singularly soothing to him. Nearby a humming bird darted, now at a

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rose, now almost disappearing in the heart of a crimson trumpet.

As they sat there talking, close to the very heart of nature, he spoke to her very tenderly, and when she raised her white face to his, what he read therein startled him. "Do you care so very much for me?" she asked. "I? Care for you? Oh, Heaven! Care for you! Why, I love you—love you madly!" "I am very sorry," Violet replied tenderly, "I have not sought your love—I discouraged you from the first hour we met—why do you love me?" He seemed puzzled. "How

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can I help it?" he cried, "who is there like you? Who is so good, so pure, so beautiful, so queenly? How can I help it?"

She was only human, young and untried—no wonder such sweet words flattered her. As he raised her hand to kiss it, she offered no resistance. Then a good impulse came to her, and she drew her hand from him, thinking to speak to him gravely and wisely—she would tell him that if he loved her so madly, it would not be wise for them to meet again—that they must part, and in time he would forget her and be

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happy; she would speak gentle words of kindly wisdom to him, and tell him they must soon part forever. All this she did tell him—and even more. Pained and silent he sat until she ceased to speak and then he said: “I cannot live without seeing you at least now and then. I cannot compel you to love me—but I will love you forever, even if my love be vain. I would rather love you, and see you once a year, than love another and see her always.”

For an instant the girl lowered her eyes, while a vivid wave of col-

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or swept over her face. A moment's silence and then she replied:

“But, Franklin, you have no right to love me so, and you must not.” He looked for a moment into the sweet, tender eyes lifted to his, then dropped his head in silence. Had she looked, she could have seen a tear, but she turned her head away. It is too sad to write—to tell how a rose dies, how a lily fades, how a wild bird pines for its unanswering mate, but harder still to trace the poignant arrow into a pure soul, or to tell how a star falls from heaven. His hope grew pale,

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and the wings of song and peace flew from out his soul. But after awhile she let him kiss her hand again—willingly. “I didn’t mean to hurt you,” she said sweetly—“and you must not be sad any more.”

Might this be a ray of hope or the straw for a drowning man? His hope was more crimson-tinted now. With one impulse they rose and began a farther stroll to enjoy the glorious sunshine and scenery. He held her arm now and then—perhaps to help her along, but “perhaps.” The natural beauty of their

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pathway was soul-expanding—always inspiring to those “who, in the love of Nature, hold communion with her visible forms.”

The sunbeams that sifted thru the thickness of the virgin forest, dotted the ground with specks of gold.

In the dewy morning, sunny noon or shadowy evening, the broad acres around them must have resembled much the original Eden. Tall sycamores, chestnuts, poplars and oaks like tall giants stood lifting their waving tops heavenward. Lover-like, they strolled slowly on

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and on beneath bended boughs festooned with clinging vines, clumps of pawpaw, spice-wood, with here and there a group of the Judas-tree and dogwood.

The undergrowth of bushes, moss-beds, fairy-like ferns and hazel thickets conspire to prevent human intrusion into the forest's virgin depths. There are said to be four thousand sink-holes and five hundred known caverns in the county in which Mammoth Cave hath wrought its giant home. The largest sink-hole is known as Eden Valley, along whose verdant expanse

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winds the county road. In size, it contains about two thousand acres—wherein are found many small and fertile farms, dotted with patches of virgin forest, and with here and there a limpid pool mirroring the over-arching sky. While this gigantic sink-hole may seem impossible, it will be more easily comprehensible if we try to imagine a two-thousand-acre valley, the bottom of which having dropped a few feet—leaves a sufficient incline around same to serve as a sort of fence.

Perhaps this enormous depres-

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sion was made by the forming of a series of caverns beneath its borders.

Filled with the very joy of living, the young couple continued their walk—enchanted with new scenes, along the border of Eden Valley, across foot-paths, past various trees and wild flowers. The old-fashioned roses and honeysuckles, sweet and fragrant, perfumed the air of that June morning for our lovers to a degree that neither had ever known before.

Occasionally a cloud veiled the sun, and the light on earth was soft

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and dim. Violet scanned the visible stretches of clouds and pictured fair islands on the outer walls of heaven. But to Franklin, the sky was empty as the desert of Sahara.

He was thinking intently. He looked at her, conscious of her sweet, youthful charm, and realized that she was about to slip away from him indefinitely—the minor conversation seemed to fall away, and he became daring. But what should he say?—what do?

At last he spoke: “I am not weak, Violet, and it is not weakness to say that my love cannot let you go.”

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“No, you are not weak,” she replied, “that’s what I call strength, a strength and a tenacity that all women admire in those who would win their love.”

He looked at her amazedly. Was there ever a man who understood woman?

“You are such a girl and only such as I should want to make my wife,” he said—and was longing to have her within his arms, her soft, warm lips caressing his while she, with glowing eyes and languorous voice, would murmur all sorts of

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foolish, meaningless, but thrilling love speeches.

She tossed her head and smiled mischievously, saying little, as is the wont of woman when a pleading lover sits at her feet. She only soothed him with her smile. The sun came out to greet them again. The landscape, the sunbeams and the breeze brought out all their natural youthful gaiety. The richness of the sky—the loveliness of their pathway led them on.

They stopped to rest again. He must have whispered something strange in her ear. The stillness of

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utter solitude shut out the world and held them awed and motionless. There was a quiet dignity and stillness about the valley, a gentleness which made it seem the natural outgrowth of its shady isolation. In this valley was an ideal spot to forget the past—and dream of the future. The hours passed. They kept no account of the time—what lovers do? Here it seemed that one could linger in the peacefulness of this solitude forever—where care and sorrow and worldly strife it seemed could surely never enter. They still lingered—forgetful in their sweet

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content. He seemed to think that this ramble meant the beginning of a long parting, and the strangeness of it all sent his thoughts leaping into realms he had never known before. His tenderness and sadness blended with her haunting sweetness. Now she talked—he alone knew what she said. The sweet tones of her voice—low and full of the charm of liquid accents, rang in his attentive ear. The shadow of a cloud again crept over the valley—dimmed the green hills, while a multitude of birds fluttered from tree to tree, and hill to grove.

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As he replied to Violet his every word betrayed his love. She bowed her head in silence—fearing to trust herself with speech. He talked of things very lovely—in a clear way that comes natural to the man with the clear-thinking mind. She beamed with pleasure while he talked, and occasionally uttered a word of protest—but the tone of his musical voice quieted her. The cool greenness seemed listening too. Observing her yet more closely as he talked on, he felt a response of love from her womanly heart. How long they strolled—and what time they

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came back to the cave hotel, need not be told here.

Next day they parted—she going to her home in Bowling Green, he to his home and business in Louisville; parted with a mutual agreement to correspond.

CHAPTER VI.

The way in which Franklin moved about in his office showed him to be a busy man. He was characterized by neatness and exactness. He set his hat straight upon his head, no unsightly wrinkle was

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permitted in his trousers. No dust was allowed to accumulate upon his desk. Many other things, too, he tabooed which some so-called respectable men allow. He furnished his office with a dark mahogany desk to match the chairs, a wood-colored rug to match the walls and even engaged a brunette stenographer to match the color of his roll-top desk. He could write checks without figuring on the stub of his check-book to see whether or not he was overdrawing his bank account. As a real estate broker, he was as shrewd as a professional horse-

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trader, but lacked that tricky gentleman's inclination to "do" the other fellow. Meditating on the snug little fortune which he had accumulated—and greatly encouraged by a big real estate deal he had just "put thru" at a net profit of some twenty thousand dollars, it occurred to Franklin Lenton that a certain matter which had long been deferred in the excitement of his rush for wealth and place should be attended to at once. He had kept in touch with Violet in a friendly sort of way, for she had never flattered him with a frank confession of her

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love. Still, her response to his wooing, he considered sufficient grounds upon which to build a castle of hope. It was his custom to visit Bowling Green monthly on "real estate business" whether he had any business there or not. On such occasions he never failed to "drop in" and pay Violet a call at her home. Since their visit to the Cave, he had sent her an occasional box of candy and flowers—but had refrained from "popping the question."

Nevertheless, the continued rankling of Dan Cupid's dart in the region of his fifth rib, kept urging him

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again to try his fate, remembering that

“He either fears his fate too much,
Or his deserts are small,
Who dares not put it to the touch,
To gain or lose it all.”

He often thought that he hadn't acted with even horse-sense in showing his affection so plainly and suddenly during their cave visit—for he learned that Violet was not demonstrative. Henceforth, he decided, he would be more sane and considerate. But he now felt that the crucial time had come, for every day Violet grew dearer to him—

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more intensely desirable. Now, for the first time in his business career, he felt that he was financially able to support a wife and a home in both style and comfort.

In the joy of his youth, his strength and his manhood he was now ready really to live—to take unto himself the woman of his choice.

The joy of his money or wealth lay not so much in the money itself as in the making of it and in the fighting of the battle for its own sake—its excitement, and most of all for Violet. Night after night,

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after leaving his busy office and sitting in the solitude of his cosy room, he would pause in his meditation—lean back in his favorite chair and dream—sweet, rose-tinted dreams—of Violet. Not of Violet, single as she was at the Cave—but as a state-ly, affectionate Violet in all the crowning glory of a silk breakfast gown, presiding over their new home, as its real queen. And perhaps, alas! oh cruel thought! complaining of the servant problem! Dear little girl! She had led such a lonely life—without brother or sister to cheer her in her loneliness.

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What a relief it would be to her! How she would dream and blossom and smile when they were just alone—in their made-to-order home! Of his past struggles and worries and heartburnings much might be written, but why think of the gloomy past? As he would sit thus musing and happy in the conscious pride of his ability to bring about so happy a condition, he used to wonder whether she would love him all the more when she discovered how he had, unarmed, entered the lists and fought his way up to the seats of the mighty, and all, or chiefly, be-

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cause he loved her. He smiled as he thought of his early poverty, but it was the smile of victory.

In his more quiet moods he seemed a little too grave, too serious, for a man of twenty-eight. Nature in moulding him had, perhaps, instilled some taint of the primordial man, which manifested itself in an irresistible desire to take without asking, to count a victory before the fight. It was enough that he wanted Violet. It seemed to him as if she must surely understand. He had hesitated to press too eagerly his suit until he had something

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more than his heart to offer. And so he had crowded his love away into the recesses of his man's soul, supremely confident that when the time came for him to bring it forth, Violet would recognize it, accept it and love him in return.

So tonight, thinking the matter over, Franklin Lenton decided that he was privileged to speak and to ask Violet to share his love and fortune.

He resolved to write the letter of proposal at his desk on the morrow. Now that the crisis of his conscience had passed, his problem solved, and

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burden gone, a blithe young man was he. Buoyant he went to his office next morning wearing a pink carnation in his lapel and with a lilt in his heart. The first delivery of mail lay on his desk, a large creamy envelope, conspicuous among the heap. The handwriting was that of Violet. Quite naturally, he opened it first.

It was an invitation to attend her marriage to one Mr. Barto Jamison—a farmer near Bowling Green. Franklin sat at his desk and stared closely at the unwelcome sheet, his face changing color and his heart

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throbbing painfully. Remembering that he was a gentleman he restrained a momentary impulse to "cuss." Then he wanted to cry. Again he wanted to—die. But he did neither. Being a man he was saved from hysterics, but his soul was indeed in troubled waters. 'Tis a rare pen that can adequately describe how love dies, how hope fades, how aspiration fails, how a heart flutters and pines, how a rosy face grows pale—or a mocking bird with lost voice or dove with a broken wing.

He remembered meeting "Mr.

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Barto Jamison" once, an overgrown country youth with "stingy trousers," and a sunburned face, with a tendency to pimples. He remembered him because of having seen him once at Violet's gate, "grinning her good bye." He remembered his five and seven-eighths head, with its shock of yellow hair, parted in the middle. Franklin seldom indulged in self-pity, but he did feel sorry for Violet. He could take his defeat like a man, could swallow the pill without cider, if he could but feel assured that "Mr. Barto Jamison" was a

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responsible, eighteen-karat specimen of manhood, fit to be trusted with such a treasure as Violet.

Leaning back in his office "chair, of business and of dreams," he pictured "Mr. Barto Jamison" on his own little farm—driving a white mule or killing potato bugs!

"The little scalawag!" muttered Franklin. "I think I'll kill him. You poor little girl, Violet—you dear little girl! To think of you tying yourself up for life with a long, slim, flimsy rabbit that smokes cigarettes, and chews gum to keep time with the clock; who grins when

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he wants to laugh and hasn't brains enough to grease a gimlet or the sense to pick a goose or ring a bell in a boarding house. Brother Jamison, you irresponsible specimen of breeches-wearing biped, I wish you luck! But if I ever catch you far out in some lonely valley, with nobody near to hear you bark, I'll certainly make Mrs. Jamison a widow."

It will be seen that the disappointed and disgusted Franklin temporarily lost his Sunday School religion. It never occurred to him that "love is blind"; that a woman

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might consider love first and the problem of existence afterward; that fools rush in—and win—where angels fear to tread. Now that to him she was unattainable, she seemed all the more lovable. He really couldn't blame "Mr. Barto Jamison" for loving her. He marveled that Jamison should have the nerve to marry her, with his little thimble-full brain box and no more assets than a white mule, a garden-farm and "stingy trousers."

It seemed to Franklin quite as ridiculous as yoking together a pole-cat and a young fawn or a buz-

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zard and a dove "till death do us part." To think that in the glorious years to come, sweet little Violet would droop and fade into a disappointed household drudge, a mere yoke animal, shattering her life and her ideals with uncongeniality. This, to our hero, was as wormwood and gall. Indeed, it seemed to Franklin as if a queen were living with a man who knew only how to slop hogs—and if perchance his fortunate rival might rise from the farm, would possibly carry a pencil behind his ear and chew gum.

Franklin resolved to forget all

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quickly. Work was the medicine for him. He didn't write Violet a letter of congratulation—but immediately ordered a couple of fine, easy rocking chairs—elegant rockers of grained oak and solid leather, the handsomest he could find. In giving the order he was careful to emphasize the date on which they must be shipped—and knowing the reliability of the firm, he felt quite satisfied. He envied “the long-legged rabbit” occupying one of the chairs—but was consoled with the thought that little Violet—the poor young thing, could have many a rest

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in the other one. Perhaps "rabbit" would have nothing but split-bottom chairs, and Franklin indulged in some self-praise over his selection of the wedding present.

"I have been a fool," thought Franklin, "but when I dance, I also pay the fiddler."

A few days had passed—and Franklin failed to forget Violet as he had hoped and resolved to do. The setting sun would entice him to one of Louisville's beautiful parks, where he went to enjoy the coolness and solitude, and would sit for hours looking upon the landscape

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and admiring the western sky. In his loneliness he would sit and meditate, scarcely forgetting for an hour the face of his lost Violet, in whom he realized he had lost for life a rare and precious jewel, the like of which he felt he could never find again. In the park he would sit far into the night. The moon shines on many tragedies, perhaps none sadder than the unhappy love of those who love and are not loved in return. Often his meditation was like a tragic dream. Once it had been so sweet to think of living with Violet in a new home. Yes, those

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weak castles in the air were beautiful ones—like rare clouds, too beautiful to last. Then he remembered that once, earth and heaven had met in their kiss by the wagon-road. But alas! it had changed to the serpent's hiss. He had lived with her in dream—now to suffer without her, even never to see her smile, never to hear her enchanting voice, never to behold her girlish face—unless to look upon it as that of another man's wife!

He had given every thought of his heart to her. To him there was no one so sweet, so good as she; all

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the heroines of whom he had ever read in books were not to be compared with Violet. He liked to ponder over every kind and tender word he had ever heard her speak, over every responsive look—surely a strange and a futile way to forget! The end of it all was a passionate idolizing of her very name, and a love not surpassed by the angels in heaven—where marriage is neither known nor desired. He arose and went down to a little brook, whose babbling voice seemed to call him to its grassy bank. From a nearby bush he broke off a spray

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of wild roses, caring not that to do so was against the rules of the park. What cared he for rules? He held the roses a moment, then threw them into the water, and as he watched the ripples full of broken light he half wished that he could float away with them to the distant sea. At times he imagined her picture in the moon-lit clouds, and would pause to look for one brief moment into that face that had been his star on earth. The desolation, the sense of loss, the keen, sharp pain, the unutterable longing haunted him like a tormenting demon.

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Just to see her—just to call her his own for a single moment and hear her say that she loved him, and he felt he would almost be willing to fall dead at her feet. Yet that sentence, filled with so much of joy or of tragedy, was never spoken—except by her eyes and smiles. How potent over all the earth is love—even when unspoken! Oft he would talk to the sky—and pause as tho' waiting for an answer. It was pitiful to see the quivering of his white face and the trembling outstretched hands. Once he wandered like a sleeping man in a walking-dream.

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Once—only once more, to look on the face he loved so well—once more to hear her voice and then to die. He walked amid the soft gloaming, a fragrance resting on the earth and filling the air with sweetness. He could almost feel the forming of the dew and hear the whisper of the wind as it moved the trees. But he must wake from his madness—he must put aside his dreaming and learn to live without her. Ah, if those who suffer would seek strength from Heaven—would lean on the arm of the One who said: “Come unto me all ye that

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labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." But he trusted in his own insufficient strength. He was like one whose soul was asleep. Perhaps he had loved unwisely, had gone on in a blissful dream, from which it seemed there was no awakening. Ah! that every young person could learn that it is best and wisest to keep the heart in his or her own bosom—well under control until prudence says, "let it go." But the stars rise and set, the leaves flourish and fade, the flowers bloom and die, the tide ebbs and flows, and no season passes but in

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some beautiful, young life the fair star of Prudence falls from the heart's heaven to cruel earth. If the stars and the skies, and the great solemn trees that look on so many tragedies, could speak with warning voices, think you that lovers would stop to think and heed? But even in his sorrow Franklin was true and good—and at last prayerful.

He realized that this side of the grave there are few mistakes without remedy. Angel spirits seemed to encourage him and in his very weakness he became strong. He

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knelt in the grass to pray. The words he used I know not—except he called Violet's name. But God, in his mercy, heard every word. He asked for power and grace from heaven to bear his burden, and claimed the Divine promise. He might have done it sooner. The silence of night was broken only by the song of the nightingale, the ripple of a brook—and a lover's prayer. The little brook singing thru its lovely banks, and laughing with joy, reflected the moon and stars in its clear bosom; the bird sang with a softer melody—as tho'

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it would blend its song with the prayer, and the shimmering moonlight, glorifying all, seemed straight from heaven. Franklin arose, and walking calmly away with new courage and power was soon at home asleep.

CHAPTER VII.

In the midst of trials, my brother,
Yield thou not to dire dismay;
For angels will come to roll
From thy grave the stone away.

Back at his office the next morning, Franklin Lenton found a pleas-

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ant surprise in the morning mail that lay on his desk. A letter from Violet.

“Dearest Franklin, I hope it will be an agreeable surprise for you to learn that I have broken my engagement to Barto Jamison. You will want to know the reason of my sudden engagement to this man—and the ‘why’ is simply this: It was in obedience to the request of my father—on account of Mr. Jamison’s having recently fallen heir to a small fortune. But yielding to my tears and protest, my father has done the right thing—has consent-

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ed that I might do my own choosing. I did not love Mr. Jamison sufficiently to become his wife, or ever to be happy in his keeping. Hence our broken engagement. I am now free as a song-bird and fully as light-hearted. I have not forgotten that you love me nor for a moment ceased to admire your noble character, and if I have caused you pain, I pray to be forgiven. Recently I have felt as if some great unseen power were drawing me to you, and I must now confess that you are my highest ideal of a gentleman—a strong and noble man.

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You will still find a welcome in our home, just as in the golden past. Father fully agrees with me now, that money cannot buy happiness—that only true love, intelligence and congeniality can make life worth the living. Come to see us, Franklin, when you can, and write soon to

Yours lovingly,

VIOLET.”

When Franklin had finished reading the letter he was in such a state of pleasureable excitement as to be unable to read his other mail, so telling his brunette stenographer to open and answer his business let-

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ters he took a "whole hour off" for rejoicing. His heart beat high with hope and happiness and thrilled with the fine courage of youth. Then he would surprise her greatly when she became "Mrs. Violet—Franklin Lenton"—for she was really unaware of his business success—and the snug fortune he had acquired. When he had become sufficiently calm he wrote her a long letter—asking her to be his wife. Within a few days the sun was again shining full orbéd, the birds were singing and he was happy in hope. "June's my lucky month," thought

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Franklin—for he remembered the two beautiful Junes when he had met Violet at Mammoth Cave, and now he chose June for their wedding at Violet's home at Bowling Green. A few visits and a few more letters passed between them; the time set was mutually agreeable—and all arrangements were made.

CHAPTER VIII.

Violet awoke with a start at beholding the bright sunshine and the soft, purple glow of a June morning. All night she had traveled the

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white way of visions and dreams—for it was the night before her wedding-day. For a few moments she lay quite still, her eyes closed and her heart gravely tender. The mysterious unknown is coming upon her and she waits, quiescent, under the new sentiment. Thru the open window comes the early chatter of birds. As never before she knows just why they are singing, and why the earth glows green, and why the corner of the sky from her window is so blue. For some reason, Granny thought it would rain; but it did not—for it is her wedding day.

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Violet turns her eyes to her mother's face, but finds her still asleep. Somehow, Violet is glad of it—for she wants to have this perfect waking *all to herself*. The day is Violet's, set apart and separate. Tho' the family may share it, feel its thrills—only for two—him and her, shall it be complete. Love, after all, opens the Gate Beautiful! and heaven stoops to kiss the common earth. And yet, in her musing, Violet wishes that mother would wake and say something tenderly sweet to her, something about its being the last time together as an un-

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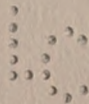
broken circle—and the like. It is the last time for so many things! A little lump comes into her throat and she closes her eyes quickly, the lashes lie wet on her cheeks. The last time to wake in this sunny, flower-decked room, with the things in it so familiar to her; her parents' picture, her own picture taken in early girlhood; the Gibson Girl by the window—and Franklin's photograph that mother is going to keep. Violet sits up in bed, quietly so as not to wake the dear mother, who had slipped into her room to sleep with her on this, her last night at

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home. Then pushing the hair back from her eyes she gets out of bed very softly, goes to the window—and looks out upon the green lawn, the gray sky and the nodding flowers. She falls upon her knees in prayer, whispering something about mother and father, and Franklin and herself and their future. She does not say “amen,” for the day is not ended—and the whole day is to be a prayer, partly unuttered, but, nevertheless, a prayer, of gratitude for the bringing of two loving hearts into perfect oneness. The day fades in Violet’s vision into one

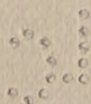
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of witchery and wonderful ceremony, and she wonders whether her mother will smile or cry. Now the mother wakes: "Dear, are you up?" Violet does not answer, but goes to the bed and kisses the familiar face. "Mother," she whispers, "it's not raining!" And mother smiles and pats the girl's shoulder. "No, Violet, my little girl will not begin with shadows. Are you rested, dear?" She nods affirmatively, and then buries her head on the shoulder of her best friend on earth—that mother with wrinkles and silver hair. Oh, that dear



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home, to be hers no longer! The mother perhaps feels something of it, too, for she is holding Violet close to her bosom. But presently she rises and says cheerfully: "Violet, darling, don't linger, the florist is to be here at nine." Violet kissed her again, for no other reason save that it is just mother. Violet is soon dressed for breakfast, and ready to go down stairs—but stands a moment at the door to look back at mother who is so much a part of this rose-decked room—and the things in it to which she must say good bye! Violet calls the name of



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mother again—softly, and the response is so tender: “O, Violet, dear, how I shall miss you!” As Violet runs quickly down the stairs there is a warm glow still about her heart.

The florist is there, and the two parlors are white with daisies and green with fern and glowing with Golden-Gate roses. The bay window at the end is a leafy bower, and tropic palms stand high above her head. Violet ties the bow herself that will shut her and Franklin inside, and admires the white and green standards that will form the

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aisle. She is so glad the parlors are big enough, and that this dear home is to see it all straight thru to the end; for there needs be no white altar but the altar of home, and this four-walled sanctuary that has sheltered all the long—and yet very short, beautiful years of her girlhood, shall give her at last into the keeping of another—a strong, true man whose loving care shall be hers always. But now, Franklin seems to be Violet's last thought, for she is thinking, somehow, less often of him than of the things she is leaving—and perhaps it should

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be so, for all the days and years to come will be full of him—but this one last day for home! They have lunch now, and all the time Violet is wandering in the garden of the gods—it is growing so near now, the beautiful thing that is to come! Now the bride-to-be is approached by the father: “Violet,” he says gravely, “your mother and I have a gift for you—we hope that you will be as happy”—he pauses to clear his throat—“as happy, you and Franklin, as we have been.” He has thrust something, a paper, into her hand; she doesn’t know

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whether it's a check for a hundred or a thousand, and she hardly cares. Whatever it is, it is the measure of their loving sacrifice. Thru a sudden mist she seeks the father's face, but he has his eyes now upon the mother—the old, forgotten bride—look comes back to the mother's eyes. This Violet observes closely. They are going back to that day which meant for them what this day means to their only daughter.

“O, father! it's so sweet of you!” cries Violet, and passes on into her room—to dry her eyes. Like a trio of June roses that grew together

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upon the same stem, one will soon be plucked in its native sweetness, separated and borne away—not to wither, but to bloom even more sweetly in a new home. The Gate of Girlhood is still open, but already in anticipation Violet is on the other side of it, and in a short time it will close!

The hour has struck and all are in the flower-strewn parlor, ready for the beautiful event of a life-time. Violet is trembling, and feels sure she is pale, but a father's strong arm is around her shoulders—and she feels just a little girl once more.

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In the bay window sits the minister—looking so solemn—waiting. Conspicuous in the group, is a tall, handsome young man, in a new suit, and wearing a white bow and a white rose—for it's Violet's flower, and his eyes are steadily upon the bride-to-be. Of course it is Franklin. Violet's eyes, for a moment, travel over a sea of friendly faces—and suddenly, they rest upon the mother. She is smiling at Violet, the old, mother-smile known so well. The girl sends a wavering little smile back at her, as she used to do when she was a little girl going off

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to school. Now Violet stands clear-eyed and beautiful at Franklin's side—now her hand is in his, before the minister. Together, Franklin and Violet repeat as little children, all the minister tells them, but of it all, one line sings itself over and over in her consciousness, because it's God's law and their hearts are in it: "Till death do us part!" It is still sounding its sacred note when Violet turns, smiling, the ring upon her finger, to meet them all—these persons who have known her all the years of her girlhood—and Violet knows that just two things

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will stand out forever from this wonderful wedding day, lasting thru the years, and making it real and present to her—those words and her mother's kiss! The rest of it seems all a dream, a dream of June—of life's gay living and the heart's glad giving.

Somebody calls—"The carriage is waiting"—and Violet puts her little gloved hand into everybody's hand, and kisses many of them—the ones she loves the best—twice. Last of all, she comes to the father and mother. Both of them have her at one time, and suddenly she feels

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that she doesn't want to go away at all. She clings to them both, almost desperately, while Franklin stands by, his face gravely troubled—and then, when Violet looks at her own Franklin, she realizes how good and noble he is, and how he too is giving up his boyhood home, and his mother and father, to travel with his little Violet out into the unknown and untried future—to work for her all the years of his life, to make them both satisfied and happy.

Having made their way midst happy friends to the open carriage

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Franklin tenderly assists his beautiful bride into the coach, neither noting nor caring for the white ribbon tied to the harness, or the showers of rice.

“Good bye,” Violet whispers, “dear ones, all of you, good bye”—and she leans far out, watching them and waving her damp little handkerchief, until they fade from view. Violet sits back, very still, neither crying nor sad; she only feels the wonder and the mystery and the strangeness of it all, and the grave beauty of the new fact—they are married! Floating thru

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the open coach is a damp sweetness from the green earth—and they hear the soft twitter of birds calling. Franklin leans down, very simply and tenderly, and kisses his own.

“Violet,” he says, “do you hear the birds? It is nesting time!”

She knows what he means—for they are also beginning the building of a new life together, that shall be fair and fine and true!

“Franklin, isn’t it beautiful,” she says sweetly, “isn’t it impressive and sacred—‘til death do us part!’ ”

THE END.

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